**OPENING STATEMENT OF**
**THE HONORABLE VERNON J. EHLERS**
**CHAIRMAN**
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY AND STANDARDS**
**COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE**
**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Hearing on Tsunamis: Is the U.S. Prepared?
Wednesday January 26, 2005, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

A month ago today one of the most devastating tsunamis ever recorded struck the nations of the Indian Ocean Basin. My prayers continue to go out to the victims of this terrible event. It is a startling reminder of our vulnerability to natural disasters. As people recover from the shock of the tsunami, we naturally begin to ask the questions such as "What can we learn from this to prevent future disasters?" In that vein, I am pleased that Chairman Boehlert organized today's hearing about the state of preparedness for detecting and responding to tsunamis in the United States.

As Chairman of the Environment, Technology, and Standards Subcommittee, I am particularly interested in the role that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Weather Service plays in tsunami detection and warning systems. Currently, NOAA operates a tsunami warning system for the Pacific Ocean. Recently, the Administration announced an interagency plan to increase U.S. risk assessment, detection, warning, and disaster planning for tsunamis. Under the plan, NOAA would expand its current system nationwide using emergency supplemental appropriations in Fiscal Year (FY) 2005 of $14.5 million and then $9.5 million in FY 2006. While I support the Administration's plan to expand our tsunami detection systems, I am concerned about adequate funding in the out years for maintenance of the system. Currently only three of the six deep-ocean buoys used to detect tsunamis in the Pacific Ocean are working.

Advanced tsunami detection buoys and real-time warning systems will only take us so far. People in coastal areas, and those visiting coastal areas, must learn to recognize the signs of natural disasters like tsunamis and must know how to respond appropriately to warnings. One of the news reports from the Indian Ocean tsunami was about a young school girl who had just learned about tsunamis in class. On vacation with her family, she recognized that the unusually large amount of water receding from the beach was a sign that a tsunami was coming and warned those near by to flee to higher ground. Her efforts saved dozens of lives. We should all know basic signs of natural disasters like this. This is a perfect example of why we must continue to work for improved science education in all of our schools.

Unfortunately, it has taken this tragic event to bring natural disaster response planning to our attention today. However, now that the opportunity is upon us we must act quickly to establish a detection and warning system for the United States, and collaborate intensely on an international system. Not only must we develop an excellent world-wide detection system, but must also do the harder task of implementing a good warning system and training the public to understand and heed the warnings.